

In 2006, by unanimous consent, the Senate took up and passed the House's Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act. One of the provisions of this bill, meant to shore up the long-term security of postal retiree health benefits, required that the Postal Service begin the prepayment of health benefits 75 years in advance. While no other public agency or private business stipulates this degree of prepayment, I consented in 2006 because the economy was strong, the Postal Service could manage these prepayments, and I believed that any needed changes to the proposal could be made with the same level of bipartisan comity as in 2006. How wrong I was.

Of course, since 2006, the economy has collapsed, first-class mail volume has fallen precipitously, and bipartisanship in the Congress has taken a nose dive. These factors together explain how the U.S. House of Representatives has converted a \$100 million profit in the first quarter of fiscal 2013 into a \$1.3 billion loss. While many American businesses have gone under during the Great Recession and others have struggled just to stay afloat, House Republicans have refused to budge on the health benefits prepayment.

You may ask why the onus resides at the feet of House Republicans. After all, the Senate consented to the 2006 House Republican-sponsored bill. But since that time, only the U.S. Senate has taken measures to solve the problem. Last year we took up and passed the 21st Century Postal Service Act of 2012, which would have lightened the fiscal burden on the Postal Service until its lost revenues from the economic slump and reductions in first-class mail could be offset by growth into the package delivery market. This bill was passed on a bipartisan basis here in the Senate despite record-breaking partisanship by the Senate minority. I should note, as with any bipartisan measure, there were provisions in this bill with which I disagreed. Yet it turned out to make little difference, since the Senate bill languished in the House. In fact, the House even failed to take up its own bill and pass it as an alternative to the Senate proposal.

Meanwhile, the Postal Service continues to stagger under the crushing burden of 75 years of prepayments for retiree health benefits. This effort, which originally looked like a reasonable effort to shore up retiree benefits, has become the proverbial albatross.

Rather than addressing this problem, the strategy of the House of Representatives appears to be to force the Postal Service into default, at which point their draconian demands for slashing cuts will look reasonable by comparison to their manufactured crisis. If this strategy sounds familiar, it should—it is the same strategy Republicans used to negotiate the Budget Control Act of 2011, using U.S. credit worthiness as a hostage they seemed more than willing

to kill. This strategy ultimately cost the United States its triple-A rating with Standard and Poor's and an estimated \$1.3 billion in additional interest payments in 2011 alone, according to the Government Accountability Office. And that figure will escalate with time. That's \$1.3 billion more that taxpayers will pay to Chinese lenders and Wall Street banks in order for Republicans to secure sequestration cuts to Medicare cancer treatments, cut National Guard technicians' salaries through furlough, and reduce Head Start programs for needy children.

The strategy worked so well in the summer of 2011 that it has overtaken everything else in the Republican playbook. Unable to sell a shrinking vision of America to voters in 2012, Republicans are left with procedural mechanisms to obtain their desired outcome. Ironically, if they are successful, they are likely to simultaneously celebrate victory and blame President Obama and Senate Democrats for letting them get their way. If that seems like an absurdity, compare the conflicting statements of the Speaker of the House JOHN BOEHNER and Chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee GREG WALDEN on proposed cuts to Social Security in the President's 2014 budget proposal. The President finally proposed reductions to entitlement programs after Republicans had long demanded such cuts, eliciting muted praise from Speaker BOEHNER while Chairman WALDEN accused the President of "going after seniors." I should note that as part of House leadership, Chairman WALDEN works for Speaker BOEHNER.

So do not be surprised when a new rendition of this plan causes a default by the Postal Service, after which Republicans demand reductions in the Postal Service's competitive product line and massive layoffs of postal employees. I supported last year's Senate postal reform bill in the hope of striking a compromise. But there are better ways to balance the Postal Service's books, and recognizing that the House has refused compromise, I am glad to join Senator SANDERS and other Democratic Senators in a full-throated articulation of a better vision for the USPS.

This vision is articulated by our bill, the Postal Service Protection Act of 2013. This bill would allow the Postal Service to recover huge retirement pension overpayments estimated by the Inspector General of USPS to be \$75 billion. It would alleviate the remaining health benefits prefunding requirement. It would protect postal customers from having their local postal facilities closed without the Postal Service following proper criteria. The bill would permit the Postal Service to sell non-postal products and services. It would allow the mailing of beer or wine by a licensed manufacturer in accordance with the laws of the States. It would permanently protect one of the Postal Service's greatest commercial

advantages over its competitors, Saturday delivery. And it would set the table for long-term growth into the package delivery market by establishing a Chief Innovation Officer and a Postal Innovation Advisory Commission.

Like any business enterprise, the Postal Service cannot cut its way to greatness. It must find areas where it can grow. The Postal Service Protection Act of 2013 would give the Postal Service the financial breathing room and innovation mechanisms it needs to chart a new and sustainable course in the next century, when email and package delivery will supplant first class mail. These changes do not diminish our commitment to Ben Franklin's vision; they facilitate its renewal, recognizing that while change is not easy, it is also unavoidable. In that spirit, I call on all Senators to join me in cosponsoring Senator SANDERS' Postal Service Protection Act and in keeping faith with Americans by protecting an indispensable American institution.

TRIBUTE TO JOHN VARRICCHIONE

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I wish to recognize a man who is a leading contributor to the preservation of the Italian community in Burlington, VT.

John Varricchio grew up in a former Italian neighborhood adjacent to downtown Burlington. I have my own fond memories of that neighborhood, travelling with my mother—a first generation Italian-American—from Montpelier to Burlington to shop in the small, family-owned, Italian markets there. Only remnants of the neighborhood remain, as most of it was lost to urban renewal in the 1960s.

I had the pleasure of joining John and other members of the Vermont Italian Club for the dedication of a historic marker, which serves as a reminder of the wonderful neighborhood in which he grew up, and of the people who lived there. John was instrumental in making the marker possible. We all shared wonderful Italian food after the dedication ceremony. I was honored to be part of such a special event.

John never moved far from the old neighborhood. He stayed in Vermont and became an outstanding teacher and coach at Rice Memorial High School—a Catholic school in South Burlington—where he became affectionately known among students as "Mister V." Many Rice graduates consider him a favorite teacher.

John's contributions to the Vermont Italian Club, and his efforts to preserve our State's Italian heritage, are many. In honor of his work, I ask unanimous consent that an article published in The Burlington Free Press on May 10, 2013, "Fragrant memories of Burlington's deep Italian roots," be printed into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Burlington Free Press, May 10, 2013]

FRAGRANT MEMORIES OF BURLINGTON'S DEEP ITALIAN ROOTS

(By Melissa Pasanen)

John Varricchione, 66, has strong memories of growing up in the heart of Burlington's Little Italy, he said last Monday while he and his wife helped their friend Mary Anne Gucciardi make a batch of her famous meatballs in their Burlington kitchen.

At one point, Varricchione donned an apron imprinted with the name of the Vermont Italian Club and three photos from the early 1900s of three families who were among the pillars of the community: the Eveltis, the Varricchiones and the Merolas.

His grandfather, Luigi Varricchione, originally came to Burlington in 1912 at the suggestion of the Merolas who preceded him and who hailed from the same town about an hour east of Naples back in Italy.

The family first lived on Cherry Street at the core of the Italian neighborhood, and Luigi Varricchione made wine in his basement like many of the area's Italian families. He was a member of the Vermont Italian Club in the 1930s when it was men-only, although the club hosted regular meals for everyone, charging 50 cents for men and a quarter for women and children. The club maintains the tradition with an annual fundraising dinner in late winter or early spring. (See vermontitalianclub.org for more information.)

Varricchione remembers back to when he was 9 or 10 "going to mass with my father at the old Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception" and then walking a block to where his grandmother lived on South Union Street with one of her sons after her husband passed away.

"There were grapevines growing up the wall and a garden in the back for herbs," Varricchione recalled. "Grandma would often be making pasta from scratch and it would be hanging all over on wooden drying racks or laid out on the bed on a clean sheet. She would serve me a bowl of pasta with sauce or a bowl of her greens and beans. On occasion," he added, "she'd pull out the anisette and little Johnny got to taste."

Both Varricchione and Gucciardi recalled the bustling Italian stores with cheeses and salamis hanging from the ceiling and shelves holding big jars of olives and boxes of torrone, Varricchione's favorite nougat candy.

"We'd go to the store for penny candy," said Varricchione. "There was Merola's and also Izzo's Market. Both stores were very generous in allowing people to buy on credit." The whole neighborhood was lost to urban renewal by the late 1960s, Varricchione explained sadly.

Looming large in his recollections was the image of the Italian mama "with plenty of love and food to share," Varricchione said. There were always many mouths to feed, he said with a chuckle: "There weren't too many small Italian families."

Varricchione's parents, Francesco and Simone (known as Si), raised their eight children at 85 Bank St. and then 78 Pine St. (now a law office).

"We would have crowds to eat," said Varricchione, recalling with relish how his mother browned pork chops and then slow-braised them in red sauce. Even though his mother, like Gucciardi's mother, was originally French-Canadian, she learned all the Italian recipes and became a true Italian mama and then nonna.

In a family history written by Varricchione's wife, Joanne, she describes the scene:

"Everyone managed to squeeze around the kitchen table while Nona [sic] stood watch

over the stove, stirring her delicious sauce. The menu seldom varied: spaghetti and meatballs, chicken or pork, salad, wine, garlic bread and ice cream. The laughter and commotion only added to the wonderful aromas and meals she prepared . . . Si seldom sat down and ate with the family; she preferred to make sure everyone had enough to eat. ('Does anyone need more sauce?' was the question she always asked.) 'No, Ma. Come and sit down.' 'I will in a minute.' It was a habit she never broke."

TRIBUTE TO MARY ANNE GUCCIARDI

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, Vermont is home to many treasures, from our natural beauties to our manufactured goods to our award-winning agricultural industry. It is also home to many spirited personalities, and today I would like to honor one of them: a good friend and talented cook, Mary Anne Gucciardi. Affectionately known as "Mama Gucc" to those who have had the good fortune of sitting at her dining room table, she makes newcomers feel like old friends. For more than two decades, she has opened her home to hundreds of University of Vermont sports teams, from skiing to soccer, hockey to basketball. Her menu includes classics like baked stuff mushrooms, chicken cacciatore, and of course meatballs and sauce. The mere mention of her name makes both coaches' and athletes' mouths water.

Mama Gucc grew up in Haverhill, Massachusetts, the daughter of an Italian-American father and a French-Canadian mother. It was her mother's Italian mother-in-law who served as the inspiration for Mama Gucc's gourmet Italian favorites. As the grandson of Italian immigrants myself, I have benefited from Mama Gucc's lavish feasts. She has made me feel right like I was right back in my own mother's kitchen. Mary Anne's heart is even bigger than her generous portions. She has not only cooked for hundreds of athletes, hosted distinguished guests such as bishops, senators and governors, but she has prepared countless charity dinners, raising over \$50,000 in scholarships in memory of a UVM student, Kevin Roberson, tragically killed in a car accident. Her love for cooking and for hosting has made "Mama Gucc" a surrogate mother for the lucky student-athletes to come through her door, making those students, sometimes hundreds of miles from their families, feel right at home. In 1999, The University of Vermont honored Mama Gucc and her husband by naming a new fitness facility the Richard and Mary Anne Gucciardi Recreation and Fitness Center, a tribute most rightfully deserved.

From every Vermonter who has indulged in Mama Gucc's famous cooking, and has been blessed with her warm hospitality and generous support, we thank Mary Anne Gucciardi for providing a home-away-from-home to all who have passed through her doors.

I ask unanimous consent that The Burlington Free Press article, "Celebrating the Italian Mama," be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Burlington Free Press, May 10, 2013]

"CELEBRATING THE ITALIAN MAMA"

Among iconic maternal figures, the Italian mama or nonna (grandmother) hovering over a fragrant pot of tomato sauce ranks high—and few bring the legend to life better than South Burlington's Mary Anne Gucciardi.

Recently in the Burlington kitchen of friends, Gucciardi, 80, known as Mama Gucc (pronounced "gooch"), arrived not only with ingredients to make her famous meatballs and sauce, but also containers of meatballs and sauce, Italian wedding soup and sausage Calabrese to give away.

"You get back what you give out," said the mother of four and grandmother of four with a smile and a shrug.

If that were literally the case, Gucciardi would be swimming in an ocean of herb-flecked tomato sauce with meatballs.

For more than two decades until just a few years ago, Gucciardi regularly cooked huge Italian feasts for a number of University of Vermont sports teams with the support of her husband and family. Her multi-course dinners—usually once a season for the ski, soccer, hockey and basketball teams—included a variety of home-cooked Italian classics like minestrone, baked stuffed mushrooms, chicken cacciatore, meatballs and sauce, and lasagna for as many as 40 team members.

"She opened up her home to us," said longtime UVM men's ice hockey coach, Mike Gilligan. "She just treated the kids and the coaches like they were her own family."

"Mama Gucc was just wonderful," agreed former men's basketball coach, Tom Brennan. "She took care of us before we got pretty," he joked, referring to the pre-championship-era of his team. "The food was always so lavish, from soup to nuts . . . You know these kids, they eat like horses. Everybody would eat until they couldn't stand up."

"She was always there for us," Brennan continued, recalling how Gucciardi accompanied the team to the 1993 funeral of their recently graduated teammate, Kevin Roberson, who had been tragically killed in a car accident. "It was so comforting to have her there and she brought a big pile of food."

In addition, the Gucciardi family held frequent dinner parties for distinguished guests including coaches, senators, governors, professors and bishops, and also cooked countless benefit dinners, which raised more than \$50,000 for a UVM scholarship fund in Roberson's name. In September 1999, UVM honored Gucciardi and her husband by naming a new 6,000-square-foot fitness facility the Richard and Mary Anne Gucciardi Recreation and Fitness Center.

It all began after Gucciardi met some student-athletes while helping with a Newman Catholic Center fundraiser, she explained while mixing together a double batch of meatballs. ("I never make a single batch," she said.) During winter break, when athletes often had to stay on campus to train, she said, "they were away from home, looking for a good meal. There was a lot of joy in seeing them enjoy the food."

Gucciardi also shared a more personal motivation to give back after her youngest son, now 50, survived a very serious car accident when he was 3½. The family was in the process of moving to Burlington where her husband had landed a job with General Electric.